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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001120

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/11/2016  
TAGS: [IS](#) [KPKO](#) [LE](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#)  
SUBJECT: MGLE01: LEBANON, SHEBAA FARMS, AND THE GHAJAR  
ANOMALY

REF: BEIRUT 944

Classified By: Ambassador Jeffrey D. Feltman. Reason: Section 1.4 (d).

SUMMARY

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11. (C) On April 7, UNIFIL Senior Adviser Milos Strugar briefed econoff on the unusual situation of the divided village of Ghajar. The Blue Line cuts through the center of the village with the northern two-thirds inside Lebanon, and the southern one-third inside the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. The village's 1,500 residents are Syrian Alawites who hold Israeli citizenship. They say they desire to return to Syrian sovereignty, but Strugar said that privately they enjoy the benefits of their Israeli affiliation. Ghajar is a tacit no-man's land, with Israeli authorities forbidden to cross into the northern part while Lebanese authorities forsake any responsibility for the well-being of its residents. Hizballah, usually attentive to winning hearts and minds, shows no concern for their welfare or safety. According to Strugar, Ghajar residents do not interact with neighboring Lebanese towns because to do so would constitute illegal entry into Lebanon. End summary.

A VILLAGE OF ISRAELI-SYRIANS  
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12. (C) At a reception on April 7, UNIFIL Senior Adviser Milos Strugar briefed econoff on the status of the divided village of Ghajar and the resulting bizarre sovereignty complications. According to Strugar, Ghajar is a village that straddles the Blue Line to the west of Shebaa Farms. The Blue Line runs through the village, leaving approximately one-third of the village inside the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights and two-thirds inside Lebanon. (Note: The Lebanese call their side of Ghajar, "Al-Wazzani." End note.) Strugar estimated that the total population, including both sides of the village, is 1,500 residents. He said that the residents, including those that reside on the Lebanese side, are Syrians, but hold Israeli citizenship. UNIFIL observed Ghajar residents voting in the recent Israeli elections.

13. (C) Strugar said Ghajar residents say publicly that they would like their village to return to Syrian sovereignty, but based on his interactions with them, he believed they are quite content with the status quo. As Israeli citizens, the residents of Ghajar work in Israeli-controlled areas for Israeli wages, utilize Israeli social services, consume Israeli electricity, and enjoy more political freedoms than their brethren living under the Syrian regime. Ghajar residents will tell outsiders they want to return to Syrian sovereignty because they fear retribution should Israel

return the Golan Heights to Syria and because they would not want to admit the benefits of living under Israeli control, according to Strugar.

#### A NON-GOVERNMENTAL ZONE

14. (C) Ghajar is in a kind of twilight zone of sovereignty, according to Strugar. The two-thirds of the village inside Lebanon has sprung up only since Israel first occupied southern Lebanon in 1978. During the Israeli occupation, the Lebanese-Israeli border did not have much practical impact for the residents of Ghajar and they built their homes on Lebanese land then occupied by Israel. Today, the residents still move freely between north and south Ghajar. There is no wall or border crossing at the Blue Line inside Ghajar. The Israeli army maintains a fence and military positions around the southern edge of Ghajar to keep the village intact. Most Ghajar residents work inside Israel or in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

15. (C) Ghajar still functions like a united village, but with two bizarre caveats. First, the residents, as Israeli citizens, recognize the Israeli legal, educational, and economic system. However, Israeli government officials, police, and soldiers are not allowed to enter northern Ghajar as that would constitute a violation of the Blue Line. Therefore, if a crime is committed, or a resident wants to apply for a license, they must cross into southern Ghajar for government services. Strugar agreed with econoff that, in theory, a resident of northern Ghajar could commit a serious crime and refuse to cross into southern Ghajar, thus avoiding justice. Second, Strugar said the residents of both the northern and southern sides do not interact with Lebanese.

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(Note: There are some accounts that Ghajar residents are involved in smuggling between Lebanon and Israel. End Note.)

Econoff asked what would happen if a Ghajar resident from the Lebanese side wanted to shop in Nabatiyeh, the commercial center of southeastern Lebanon? Strugar replied that UNIFIL patrols, if not the Lebanese Joint Security Force, would stop him and advise him to turn back. Ghajar residents, he explained, are Israeli citizens and do not hold Lebanese passports or visas. As such, any presence on Lebanese soil is illegal entry. Therefore, all the Ghajar residents who live in northern Ghajar are inside Lebanon illegally. Lebanese authorities have told UNIFIL that they want nothing to do with the residents of Ghajar, to include law enforcement and public services. Lebanese authorities do not claim Ghajar residents as citizens or even as legal aliens.

#### HIZBALLAH SHOWING UNUSUAL CALLOUSNESS

16. (C) Strugar added that Hizballah, which is usually meticulous about winning hearts and minds in southern Lebanon, has denied any responsibility for Ghajar residents. Hizballah supports Lebanese restrictions on Israeli technicians who want to maintain and repair the Wazzani pumps that supply the village with water. Strugar recalled an encounter last summer where he was trying to persuade local officials to allow the Israeli technicians to enter Lebanon and local Hizballah officials came to the site. They told Strugar: "If people of Ghajar want water, let them petition (Syrian President) Bashar Asad!" The November 22 raid into Ghajar by Hizballah also demonstrates a lack of empathy for its residents. Hizballah fighters came with guns blazing. The ensuing firefight with Israeli forces could have resulted in civilian casualties. Hizballah elsewhere in southern Lebanon is careful to avoid fighting in populated areas.

#### COMMENT

¶7. (C) Ghajar's fate is linked to the Shebaa Farms dispute. Some Lebanese claim it to be a part of Lebanon based on maps from the 1920s, while others admit it would not be practical to lay claim to this village of Syrians with Israeli citizenship (reftel). Ghajar is also a potentially more dangerous flashpoint because of the risk of collateral damage from Hizballah attacks. End comment.  
FELTMAN